

Medical Schools of the West

The University of Southern California School of Medicine

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Founded as the second school of the University of Southern California (USC) in 1885 by Joseph Pomeroy Widney, MD, the School of Medicine survives today as one of three private coeducational medical schools in the state of California. Its beginnings were as fragile as those of many other California schools: Dr Widney and ten colleagues rented the Vache Freres Winery, a two-story brick building at 445 Aliso Street in Los Angeles (Figure 1), as the first teaching quarters of the medical school.¹ Dr Widney believed strongly that the medical students should be well prepared in Greek and in Latin and personally screened the applicants. He consulted with Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania for appropriate curricula, set the tuition and printed the schedules and curricula. The first bulletin states that graduates must be 21 years of age and of good moral character, have completed three years of the study of medicine, passed the examinations, dissected an entire cadaver and paid the fees, which amounted to \$315 for three years. Dr Widney's first catalogue also stated that "good boarding with room rent can be had in the city for from \$5 to \$10 a week." After the first year, he bought the winery and the medical school remained in this location for ten years. The first class was graduated in 1888 and consisted of eight men and one woman.

During the ten years on Aliso Street, there were many changes in faculty and in curriculum. The three-year course was changed to four years and attendance was made compulsory. Unable to afford to build or buy a teaching hospital, the clinical teaching sites became the Los Angeles County Hospital and the then brand-new California Hospital. In 1909 the school affiliated with the University of California as the Los Angeles Medical Department of the University of California and offered undergraduate courses until 1914. Students who were in school during the years of the changeover were per-

mitted to choose their alma mater, and thus the inscription on their diploma; many of them felt an allegiance to USC and considered themselves alumni. The actual sequence of events after 1914, as related by Viola Lockhart Warren² in her article "The Old College of Medicine," is complicated. However, the University of Southern California promptly affiliated with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which became USC School of Medicine.

The School of Medicine was closed from 1920 to 1928; it has been graduating physicians each year since it reopened. During World War II, classes were accelerated even though many of the male faculty members accepted assignments in overseas military units.

Throughout its long history, the institution has trained physicians for the practice of medicine in California and it is estimated that of the more than 2,800 living alumni, approximately three fourths practice within 100 miles of Los Angeles. Through its affiliations with community and public general hospitals, its patient care, teaching and research activities have enhanced the health of the area's citizens while providing superb training facilities for young physicians.

Organization of the School of Medicine

The medical school is organized by basic science and clinical departments under the direction of Dean Allen W. Mathies, Jr, MD. There are 764 full-time, 63 part-time and 2,582 voluntary faculty members. This diverse faculty instruct 581 medical students in a four-year degree granting program leading to the MD degree. The faculty also instruct some 85 graduate students enrolled in PhD degree granting programs; 1,000 interns, residents and fellows enrolled as postdoctoral associates in graduate medical education training programs, and 4,000 health-related trainees in more than 100 preparatory programs (nurse midwives, physician's assistants,

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nurse practitioners, medical technicians). More than 9,000 physicians and nurses enrolled in continuing education programs directed by the Division of Postgraduate Education in 1980-1981.

Students and Their Curriculum

USC School of Medicine admits 136 entering students each year. These students are chosen by members of the admissions committee from an applicant pool of approximately 4,000; about 1,000 of the applicants are personally interviewed. In the 1981-1982 entering class, the grade point average was 3.59. A total of 118 students held baccalaureate degrees, 12 master's degrees, and six PhD degrees. There were 4 second-year and 16 third-year transfer students admitted. The total student body is 581 (435 men and 146 women); of these students 138 are US citizens designated as ethnic minorities.

The curriculum is organ-system oriented. Students learn about normal human functioning during the first year with the basic sciences centered on anatomy, biochemistry, physiology and human behavior. During the second year the emphasis is on the pathologic condition of patients with the basic sciences centered on pharmacology, pathology and microbiology. Small groups of five students assigned to one physician meet one to two half-days each week in Introduction to Clinical Medicine. In these groups students study growth and development, history taking and physical examinations, as well as learn about community settings—for example, how patients are cared for in alcohol rehabilitation centers, nursing homes and retirement homes. They learn how to communicate with patients and how to handle the frustrations of pain and suffering and death and dying.

In the final two years of medical school, a fully rotating two-year continuum permits the students flexibility in scheduling a combination of required and

selective clinical clerkships with the permission of a faculty adviser. An increased number of clinical clerkships are taught in the affiliated community hospitals of the School of Medicine. From 60 to 70 graduating students choose to take their first postgraduate year of training in one of USC's affiliated hospitals, which is not surprising given the large ratio of California citizens who choose this school. Nearly all of USC's medical school graduates continue specialty training leading to board certification.

Affiliated Hospitals of USC School of Medicine

For many years the primary teaching affiliate of the School of Medicine has been the big public general hospital, now known as the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center (Figure 2). Major changes began to take place in the relationship with the County of Los Angeles in the 1960s. As Loma Linda School of Medicine moved to its new home in Loma Linda, California, and the California College of Medicine became University of California, Irvine, USC took over all of the professional services of the huge hospital, not without some trepidation. That trepidation was shared by the accrediting agency that returned to review the school's progress just three years later. The transition was very successful. Assuming the professional responsibility with full-time faculty, the voluntary faculty continued to be supportive and to this day shares the patient care and teaching load. Located on a 98-acre site, the big medical center has been called the "largest teaching hospital in the world." Today, the number of licensed beds has been reduced from more than 3,000 in the early 1960s to 2,105 and the budgeted patient census is approximately 1,500, a tribute to the research procedures which have reduced inpatient admissions.

Today the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center



Figure 1.—A painting showing the building that was the first home of USC School of Medicine. The school's founder, Dr Joseph Pomeroy Widney, leased the two-story building on Aliso Street in Los Angeles in 1885.

is more than 100 years old; one in every 225 persons born in the United States is born at Womens Hospital where the large obstetrics and gynecology service is rated one of the best in the nation. The service delivered its first "test tube baby" in May 1982; to date, three healthy "test tube babies" have been successfully delivered there. Near the obstetrical service is a fine neonatology service. Major research projects include reproductive biology, fetal monitoring and high-risk pregnancies.

The 18-story General Hospital directs acute medical and surgical care programs, critical care, coronary care, kidney dialysis and transplant, and oncology. The Department of Emergency Medicine controls a large emergency training and patient care system. At the Pediatric Pavilion, care is provided for sick children, but also for adults admitted with undetermined infectious or communicable diseases. The Psychiatric Hospital functions at maximum capacity at all times. The Medical Center provides 24-hour per day care, 365 days per year, with board-certified physicians who are members of the USC School of Medicine faculty.

Other major affiliates of the School of Medicine are

the following: Childrens Hospital of Los Angeles, a regional pediatric hospital; The Hospital of the Good Samaritan, where much of the school's private practice consultation work is carried out; Orthopaedic Hospital, which is the location of the Department of Orthopaedics and a large research laboratory in bone mechanics; Presbyterian Intercommunity Hospital, which is the site for the family medicine residency training program, and Huntington Memorial Hospital. The Doheny Eye Foundation is located on the Health Sciences Campus and is the home base for the Department of Ophthalmology. Rancho Los Amigos, a large categorical care rehabilitation hospital, houses patients with chronic disabilities, primarily those disabled with traumatic injury. Major rehabilitation programs are the subject of research and development to enable those persons disabled through disease and injury to be productive. The only acute service still maintained at this facility is the well-known Liver Service; due to recent funding cutbacks within the County of Los Angeles, other acute care programs have been discontinued at this site. The University's physical and occupational therapy degree granting programs, research and teaching programs in gerontology,



Figure 2.—A view of the Health Sciences Campus with the upper story of General Hospital, Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center in the distant background (center).

and strong neurological, orthopedic and cardiac rehabilitation programs are located on the Rancho campus.

The School of Medicine is a newcomer to the private practice of medicine but in the last year The Richard Thomas Barton Diagnostic Clinic has opened; physicians in the community may utilize USC School of Medicine faculty as a resource for consultation and second opinions. Just completed is the Kenneth Norris Jr Cancer Research Institute, a \$38,000,000 facility with 60 inpatient beds and a large outpatient facility, which serves as the heart of the USC Comprehensive Cancer Center program (Figure 3). The Center, designated in 1970, offers programs in basic and clinical research, patient care, epidemiology and community education. The Cancer Hotline is one of the busiest in the nation.

Research and the School of Medicine

The School of Medicine is active in a broad area of research efforts. Direct funding in the past year has exceeded \$22,000,000, which placed USC as one of the

top 20 schools in the nation in ability to attract peer review awarded National Institutes of Health funds. More than 200 funded projects are actively directed by research scientists of national and international stature at the present time. Short-term research training for USC medical students is funded by a federal grant.

Conclusion

In 1981 the Liaison Committee on Medical Education of the AAMC/AMA found USC School of Medicine in good health and, following a self-study and a site visit, renewed the school's accreditation for ten years. Thus, our 100th birthday will find us in good health and in good spirits with a continuing will to prepare practicing physicians for the Southern California region.

REFERENCES

1. Rand CW: Joseph Pomeroy Widney, Physician and Mystic. Los Angeles, Anderson, Ritchie and Simon, 1970, chap 6
2. Warren VL: The old college of medicine, *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly*, Dec 1959—Mar 1960

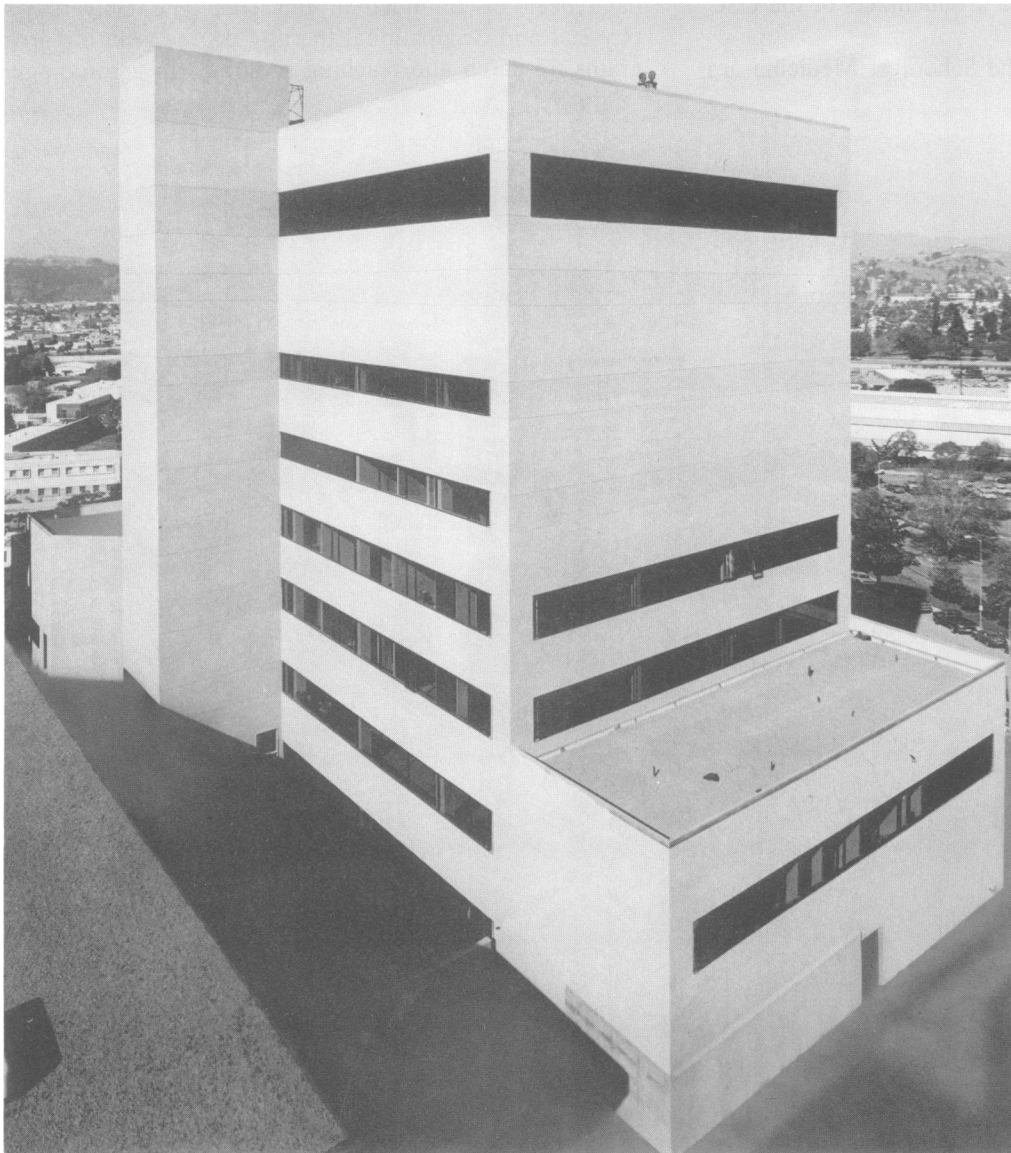


Figure 3.—The USC Comprehensive Cancer Center is housed in the new Kenneth J. Norris Jr Cancer Research Institute on the Health Sciences Campus. The 150,000 square foot, nine-story building has 30,000 square feet of laboratory space, advanced radiation therapy and diagnostic equipment, beds for 60 patients who can benefit from treatments under study and facilities for 100 outpatients a day.